CHAPTER IV: SIMPLE LAUNCHES

Natural and Existing Shorelines, Beaches, and Simple Ramps

A. General Description

The simplest and most cost-effective launches require little or no construction. Paddlers may use "natural" features (e.g., riverbanks, rock outcrops, banks adjacent to bridges) or existing shorelines with decks, bulkheads, or boardwalks. Any of these can suffice as long as: currents in the area are not too strong, water depth allows for stable launching without damage to boats, and the vertical space between the shore and surface of the water is not excessive. Paddlers must also have enough space to place their boats in the water and easily step in or out of them.

B. Materials

- Native soil, sand, gravel, or vegetation may be added to improve drainage and control erosion; fist-sized rip-rap can be added to trap sediment and fill in over time
- Natural materials, unique to a particular area, may blend with the natural landscape and be most easily accessible (e.g., in the Chesapeake Bay region, native crushed oyster shells may be used to rein force surface landings)
- Flat rocks can sometimes provide firm surfaces, however pointed or jagged rocks are not recommended, as they are unstable surfaces that can damage boats or injure paddlers
- Beaches with firm substrates; matting can be used to temporarily stabilize a sandy beach
- Gravel can be used to form simple ramps, preferably in areas of minimal wave action or water level fluctuation
- Braided rope, tied to a tree or other shoreline anchor, can serve as a makeshift handrail
- Existing shoreline configurations (e.g., bulkheads, boardwalks, uneven rocks) can be converted into beach areas by adding firm sand substrates and/or gravel; these are called "implanted" beaches

C. Design variations/specifications

- Graded banks are preferable, 12' wide at water line tapered to 9' wide at top by 15' long (length will depend on water levels and shoreline stability)
- Launch area should be at least 20' at sites that are used for both rafting and paddling
- Preferred slopes meet ADA accessibility standards of 8.33%; slopes should not exceed 15%
- Water level should be deep enough to enable launching without damaging boat (preferably at least 2'); kayakers may want at least 4' to permit rolling

D. Advantages

- Cost-effective/low maintenance -- native materials can be easily added or shifted to suit needs and changing conditions of launch area
- Less environmental impact due to little or no construction
- Can be combined with simple construction to restore habitats or control erosion
- Aesthetically pleasing; minimal visual alteration to natural shoreline
- Shorelines and beaches provide can provide easy anchorage

E. Disadvantages

- May not be accessible to physically challenged paddlers
- May not be consistently accessible due to varying flows, water levels, amount of exposure, or climatic factors
- Can be slippery or difficult to manage when wet
- Can be steep
- Could cause damage to wetland habitats, depending on frequency of use
- Not easily spotted from rivers – paddlers may pass them by if there is no signage or clear indication of the access site
- Gravel ramps can erode easily and can scratch boats if paddlers do not land properly
- Chemicals from railroad ties or treated wood may pollute water where leaching occurs

F. Case examples, designs, photos

1) Rincon launch site, Arkansas River, Salida, Colorado

Photo by Caroline Wolf

Photo 4A: Rocky beach provides river access

2) Clear Creek, Golden, Colorado

Photo 4B: Kayaker launches from a level bank

3) Clear Creek, Golden, Colorado

Photos by Caroline Wolf

Photo 4C: Kayaker prepares to launch from flat rock outcrops

4) Missouri River, below confluence with Niobrara River, Nebraska

Photo by Tim Palmer

Photo 4D: Sandy beach provides access to the river

5) Sauk River, Washington

Photo by Thomas O'Keefe

Photo 4E: River is accessible from a gravel road

6) Delaware River, Narrowsburg, New York

Photo by Tim Palmer

Photo 4F: Canoes are easily launched from a sandy bank

7) Restored river bank, Arkansas River, Salida, Colorado

Photo by Caroline Wolf

Photo 4G: Restored bank with rock outcrops enables access at varying water levels

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